

“Let’s live together first”: A longitudinal investigation into whether cohabitation is a precursor to marriage among young urban South Africans.

Nicole De Wet and Jeremy Gumbo

Demography and Population Studies, University of the Witwatersrand

Nicole.dewet@wits.ac.za

Abstract

The prevalence of cohabitation is increasing globally. Often studied as an alternative to marriage, cohabitation practices are rarely studied as a precursor to marriage. In identifying if cohabitation is a step leading to marriage, we are better able to understand the popularity of this union type. Using longitudinal data from the Cape Area Panel Survey (CAPS 2002- 2006), this study examines if cohabitation is a precursor to marriage among youth in South Africa. Descriptive statistics and regression models are used. A sample of 7,305 youth in cohabiting relationships in 2002 was followed up. In 2006, only 87 of these youth reported being married. Cohabitation was found to produce lower odds (OR=0.21; p-value<0.05) of marriage in 2006. Females and unemployed youth were more likely to get married than males and employed youth in the study. Therefore, cohabitation is not a precursor to marriage among youth in the short-term. A longitudinal study with a longer duration is recommended as it is possible that this study is limited by the short duration between waves of data collection.

Keywords: cohabitation, youth, longitudinal, marriage, CAPS, South Africa

Introduction

The practice of cohabitation is increasing across the globe. Defined as a couple living together without the legality of being married, there are many similarities in being in a cohabiting relationship and being married. The lifestyle is similar, whereby individuals share an accommodation, resources and even have children (Brown and Booth, 1996, Brown et al., 2015). The difference is the cultural and religious importance attached to marital ceremonies and marriages as well as the legal environment surrounding the relationship (Manting, 1996, Perelli-Harris and Gassen, 2012). And while in some contexts cohabitation is seen as an alternative to marriage, in Botswana it was found to be a temporary phase before marriage (Mokomane, 2013). Also while laws in most countries regulate ownership of property and goods between married persons, few countries have laws which regulate cohabitation (Hiekel et al., 2014). This is seen as both a benefit and a limitation of cohabitation. In societies where marital and customary laws favour men, women are often short-changed when it comes to ownership of property and goods (Treas and De Ruijter, 2008). Women in these cases can be exploited and denied access to communal property such as houses, cars and even their own salaries (Treas and De Ruijter, 2008). In cohabitation however, where there is no legally binding contract,

women are able to retain their own property and assets both whilst in the relationship and when it ends. This lack of legal intervention can also be a downside to cohabitation in cases whereby one partner is unemployed or a ‘home-maker’ and has no independent financial source (Avellar and Smock, 2005). When these relationships dissolve, the dependent partner has no rights to claim assets and property from their partner. Given the potentially severe consequences of the latter issue, laws all around the world are being revised to recognise cohabiting partners as married partners to allow for fair distribution of property and assets (Probert, 2015, Waggoner, 2015).

The importance of this research is twofold. First, there is need to understand diverse family forms because families and households are the foundational hubs of economic and social development as well as key to health outcomes of members. Poverty, inequality, violence and poor health outcomes have all been related to families and households (Thorbecke, 2013, Barbarin and Richter, 2013, Vetten, 2014). In order to address these issues, there is need to understand the dynamics of family and household formation as a possible explanation for these outcomes. Second, most literature treats cohabitation and marriage as mutually exclusive concepts, whereby an individual is either in a

cohabiting relationship or in a marriage (Posel and Casale, 2015, Botha and Booysen, 2013, Posel and Rudwick, 2013). And due to a previous lack of available longitudinal data, the relationship between cohabitation and marriage has not been extensively studied (Moore and Govender, 2013).

The purpose of this study therefore, is to investigate the association between cohabitation and marriage among youth. Given the rates of marriage and cohabitation in the population, the study hypothesis is that cohabitation is not the final result for many young couples but is rather a precursor of marriage. In this way, cohabitation could be a possible 'marriage test' whereby young couples first live together and share property and assets before making a legally binding commitment to do so.

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

In South Africa, customary law protects the rights of partners in cohabiting relationships (Goldblatt, 2003). In fact the rights of cohabiting partners in the country, strongly resemble that of married persons. However, this has not made marriage any less attractive in the population. Even with a slight decrease in trend over time, research has found consistently high rates of marriage in the country since 1995, with between 70% and 90% of African and White women reporting ever been married in 2010 (Posel and Rudwick, 2013, Mhongo and Budlender, 2013). While it is expected that since marriage rates are high in the country, cohabitation rates would be low, this is not the case for South Africa. Research has found cohabitation to be increasing with reports of less than 10% of the population in 1995 to about 15% in 2010 being in a cohabiting relationship (Posel and Rudwick, 2013). And while cohabitation is increasingly popular in South Africa, there are two aspects of this practice worth noting. First, there are age and racial differences in cohabitation rates in the country. Before age 30, cohabitation rates between Whites and Africans in the country are fairly equal, however, after age 30 there is sharp decline in cohabitation among Whites (from 11.5% to 7.5%) while rates remain unchanged for Africans (Moore and Govender, 2013). Second, despite cohabitation moderately increasing, rates have not surpassed that of marriage in the country (Seekings, 2014, Moore, 2011). That is to say that there is no sign that cohabitation is replacing marriage in South Africa. Given this particular context, it is therefore worth investigating if cohabitation is a precursor to marriage in the country.

The theoretical framework underpinning the study is the Second Demographic Transition (SDT) Theory (Van de Kaa, 2003). The SDT is

characterised by constant sub-replacement fertility, a variety of different living arrangements in addition to marriage, a disjuncture between marriage and fertility, and no stationary populations (Lesthaeghe, 2010). Evidence of this was first seen in Scandinavia in the 1950's whereby premarital cohabitation and non-marital fertility was increasing and by the 1980's this had spread from Scandinavia to the rest of Western Europe (Lesthaeghe, 2010). Given the increase in cohabitation rates seen in South Africa, as well as the high rates of non-marital fertility, this theory proves effective in understanding cohabitation trends in the country. According to the theory, changes in nuptiality rates are a result of, among others, growing income and labour opportunities to both males and females (Lesthaeghe, 2010). Changes in education, political regimes and international gender equality measures including the increased dissemination of family planning and contraception, have also contributed to the progression from the First to the Second Demographic Transition (Van de Kaa, 2002, Galor, 2012).

Data and Methods

The Cape Area Panel Study (CAPS) is a longitudinal study of the lives of youths and young adults in metropolitan Cape Town, South Africa. Cape Town is a port city on South Africa's southwest coast. With a population of approximately 3.7 million people, it is South Africa's second most populous city. Despite the city being one of the world's most attractive tourist destinations, unemployment in the city is high at 23% (Statistics SA, 2015, Nglazi et al., 2014). Further, the city suffers many of the same problems as the rest of the country, including HIV/AIDS, high crime rates and service delivery problems (Prinsloo et al., 2016, Nglazi et al., 2014, Thompson, 2014). The first wave of the study collected interviews from about 4,800 [N=17,157] randomly selected young people age 14-22 in August-December, 2002. Wave 1 also collected information on all members of these young people's households, as well as a random sample of households that did not have members age 14-22. A third of the youth sample was re-interviewed in 2003 (Wave 2a) and the remaining two-thirds were re-visited in 2004 (Wave 2b). The full youth sample was then re-interviewed in both 2005 (Wave 3) and 2006 (Wave 4). Wave 3 also includes interviews with approximately 2000 co-resident parents of young adults. Wave 4 also includes interviews with a sample of older adults (all individuals from the original 2002 households who were born on or before 1 January 1956) and all children born to the female young adults. The study covers a wide range of outcomes, including schooling, employment, health, family formation, and

intergenerational support systems. (Lam et al., 2008). The CAPS researchers also note a 17.6% attrition rate for persons aged 14-22 years old from Wave 1 in 2002 to Wave 4 in 2006.

Youth between the ages of 14 and 22 years old who were in cohabiting relationships in 2002 are the study population. Both males and females are included in the study. The definition of youth in South Africa is broader than the international definition. In South Africa, youth are considered any person between the age of 15 and 35 years old. The South African National Youth Policy 2009- 2014, defines 'youth' as young people whose age falls between 15 and 34 years old (Presidency of the Republic of South Africa, 2009). In 2002, there were 7,305 youth in cohabiting relationships who comprise the study population of this study. This sample was then followed up to 2006.

The outcome of interest in this study is the proportion of cohabitating youth whose unions lead to marriage. The study sample is selected from the first Wave of interviews in 2002. Cohabitation was ascertained from the 'marital status' question on the survey. Respondents who reported 'not married but living with partner' are regarded as cohabiting persons in this study. Out of a sample of 4,800 [N=17,157] randomly selected youth from the first Wave, a substantial proportion (57%) of the respondents were in a marital union, while the remaining 43% were in a cohabiting union. Persons in cohabiting relationships were selected as the cohort to follow through to the latest available Wave – 2006.

In the last Wave the union status of the cohabiting persons is the outcome of interest to this study. Of the cohabiting persons who were followed up since 2002, those who have remained in cohabiting relationships and those who are married are analysed.

Demographic and socioeconomic characteristics of persons in the cohabiting cohort are included in this study. The variables are based on the theoretical framework mentioned above. Variables pertaining to the age (in five-year age intervals), sex (male or female), religion (Christian, Muslim or Other) and population group (African, Coloured, White or Indian/Asian) of the youth are analysed. Further the highest level of education (none, primary or secondary), work status (full-time, part-time or not working) and type of place of residence (urban or rural) are selected as proxy measures for socioeconomic status.

Further for the last Wave, variables pertaining to particular life experiences have been selected to determine if these events in any way have affected the outcome of marriage within the cohort. These variables include educational attainment up until tertiary level; employment status proxy by 'work for pay in the last 7 days' to which there is a yes or no response and current health status (good or excellent) on later marriage.

This study begins with describing the cohort of youth who were in cohabiting relationships in 2002. Thereafter, bivariate logistic regression is used to establish the association between cohabiting and independent or predictor variables. Finally multivariate logistic regression is used to establish the association between marriage and other predictor variables (at a later stage) and cohabiting at the first Wave. The formula for logistic regression is as follows:

$$L_i = \alpha + \beta_1 X_{1i} + \beta_2 X_{2i} + \dots + \beta_k X_{ki}$$

Where: L_i = dependent variables, α = constant, β_k = regression coefficients, X = independent variables.

Results

Table 1: Sample characteristics by cohabitation status, Wave 1

Characteristic	Cohabit					
	Yes (n=7,305)		No (n=9,853)		Total (n=17,157)	
	frequency	%	frequency	%	frequency	%
Age						
15-19	0	0	456	4.62	456	2.66
20-24	7,305	100	9,297	94.36	16,602	96.76
25-29	0	0	49	0.5	49	0.29
30-34	0	0	50	0.51	50	0.29
Sex*						
Male	1,075	14.72	301	3.1	1,376	8.1
Female	6,229	85.28	9,385	96.9	15,614	91.9

Race						
African	2,371	32.46	400	4.06	2,771	16.15
Coloured	3,840	52.57	8,509	86.36	12,348	71.97
White	1,094	14.97	945	9.59	2,038	11.88
Educational level						
Primary	1,011	13.84	246	2.5	1,257	7.33
Secondary	6,294	86.16	9,606	97.5	15,900	92.67
Type of place of residence						
Urban	7,305	100	9,804	99.51	17,109	99.72
Rural	0	0	49	0.49	49	0.28
Religion*						
Christian	6,353	86.98	5,410	54.91	11,762.87	68.56
Muslim	87	1.19	4,161	42.24	4,248	24.76
Other	864	11.83	282	2.86	1,146	6.68
Work status*						
Working full-time	2,658	36.39	4,159	43.36	6,818	40.35
Working part-time	1,078	14.76	789	8.22	1,867	11.05
Not working	3,568	48.85	4,644	48.41	8,212	48.6

*indicates a single missing value that was dropped from the analysis

Table I provides a detailed depiction of all the demographic and socioeconomic sample characteristics of the youth who participated in the study during the first Wave, by cohabitation status. With regards to the age of the respondent, the results indicate that cohabiting unions were highly prevalent among youth aged 20-24 as they exhibit an astounding 100% response rate of being in a cohabiting union. In addition, no percentage differences were found among youth aged 15-19, 25-29 and 30-34 as they all exhibited the same percentage distribution (0% respectively) which indicated that they were not in a cohabiting union. The results obtained are pivotal to the study as they indicate that cohabitation rates are particularly prevalent among youth aged 20-24.

In consideration of sex, Table I further shows that the vast majority of respondents who reported being in a cohabiting union are females as they constitute approximately 85% of the sampled population of participants. Contrary to this finding, the lowest levels of cohabitation were found among males as they constitute the remaining 15% of the sample. Furthermore, with reference to race, the results obtained in the study indicate that cohabiting unions are highly prevalent among Coloured respondents as they make up 53% of the sampled population, followed by 32% of African respondents. The lowest rates of cohabiting unions were found among White respondents as only 15% of them answered "yes".

With regards to educational level, the largest percentage of respondents who are in a cohabiting union is found among youth who are secondary school graduates as they constitute 86% of those who answered "yes" when questioned about their cohabiting status in relation to the remaining 14% of the respondents. With reference to type of place of residence, the results show that rates of cohabiting unions are higher among respondents residing in urban areas as an astounding 100% of the respondents answered "yes" when questioned about whether they are in a cohabiting union. Furthermore, Table I shows that a vast majority of the respondents who are Christians (87%) are in a cohabiting union, followed by 12% of respondents who follow other religious denominations. The lowest response rate was found among respondents who are Muslim as they constitute 1% of the remaining sampled population. With regards to work status, the results show that cohabitation is common among respondents who are not working as they constitute 49% of the sampled population who answered "yes", followed by 36% of respondents who work full-time. The lowest response rate is found among respondents who work part-time as they constitute 15% of the remaining sample.

Figure 1: Distribution of sample by union status, Wave 4

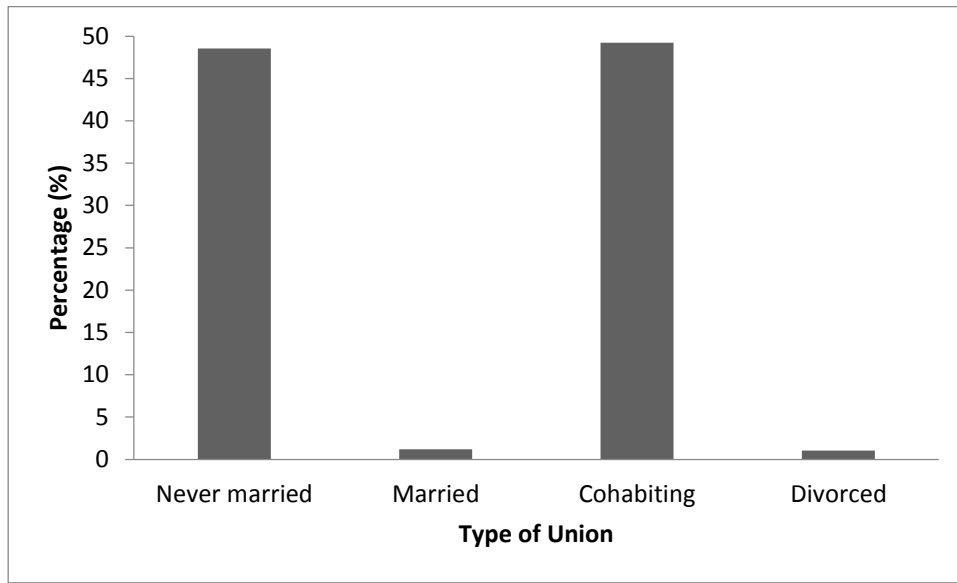


Figure 1 above illustrates the percentage distributions of the Wave 4 sample of respondents by union status. The bar graph shows that an estimated 49% of youth are in a cohabiting union followed by 48% of youth who have never been in a marital union. Additionally,

only 3% of youth are in a marital union and the lowest percentage of union status is observed among 2% of youth who are divorced.

Table 2: Sample characteristics by union status, Wave 4

Characteristic	Union Status							
	Cohabit (n=3,595)		Married (n=87)		Other (n=3,622)		Total (n=7,305)	
	frequency	%	frequency	%	frequency	%	frequency	%
Age*								
19-24	1,120	31.15	87	100	3,210	88.61	4,416	60.46
25-34	2,476	68.85	0	0	326	8.99	2,801	38.35
35+	0	0	0	0	87	2.4	87	1.19
Sex								
Male	2,525	70.24	0	0	2,386	65.88	4,912	67.24
Female	1,070	29.76	87	100	1,236	34.12	2,393	32.76
Race*								
African	0	0	0	0	2,371	65.46	2,371	32.46
Coloured	2,601	72.35	87	100	1,251	34.54	3,939	53.93
White	994	27.65	0	0	0	0	994	13.61
Education*								
Primary	0	0	0	0	163	4.61	163	2.26
Secondary	2,601	72.35	87	100	3,372	95.39	6,060	83.97
Tertiary	994	27.65	0	0	0	0	994	13.78
Work for pay etc in last 7 days?								
Yes	3,595	100	0	0	377	10.39	3,972	54.37
No	0	0	87	100	3,246	89.61	3,333	45.63

Health Status								
Good	2,502	69.58	87	100	1.92	53.06	4,511	61.75
Excellent	1,094	30.42	0	0	1,700	46.94	2,794	38.25

*indicates missing values that were dropped from the analyses

Table 2 shows a percentage distribution of all the demographic and socioeconomic sample characteristics of the youth who participated in the study during Wave 4, by their union status. With regards to age, results show that the highest rates of cohabitation are evident among youth aged 25-34 as they constitute 69% of the respondents who are in a cohabiting union, while respondents aged 19-24 are predominantly in a marital union or other union (100% and 87% respectively). Conversely, the results indicate that none of the youth aged 35 and above are in neither a cohabiting union nor a marital union based on the fact that the percentage distribution of their sampled population is only 0%. In addition, only 2% of the respondents aged 35 and above are in other forms of union. Furthermore, with reference to sex, more than half of the sampled male population are either in a cohabiting union or other union (70% and 66% respectively) while none of them are in a marital union (0% respectively). In contrast, an astonishing 100% of the sampled female population are in a marital union while the remaining proportion is either in a cohabiting union or other type of union (30% and 34% respectively).

In consideration of race, results show that 100% of Coloured respondents are in a marital union, whereas none of the remaining race groups are in a marital union as they exhibit similar percentage distributions of 0% respectively. In addition, the highest rates of cohabitation are found among Coloured respondents in relation to other race groups as they constitute 72% of the sampled population, whereas low rates of cohabitation are

predominantly prevalent among White and African respondents (28% and 0% respectively). In contrast, majority of the African respondents are engaged in other forms of union as they constitute over half of the sampled population of Africans (65%), in relation to all the other race groups.

With reference to educational level, respondents who are in a cohabiting union, marital union or other union have a secondary education (72%, 100% and 95% respectively). These figures are followed by 26% of respondents who are in a cohabiting union. In contrast, none of the respondents with a primary education are in a cohabiting or marital union (0% respectively), although 5% of the respondents are in another type of union. In terms of work for pay in the last 7 days, the highest rates of cohabitation were found among respondents who responded "yes" as they made up 100% of the sampled population. In contrast, 100% of the respondents who answered "no" were in a marital union compared to 0% of the respondents who answered "yes". In consideration of health status, results indicated that majority of all the respondents who reported good health are in a cohabiting union, marital union and other union (70%, 100% and 53% respectively). In contrast, being in another type of union is common among respondents who reported excellent health as they constitute nearly half of the sampled population (47% respectively), in relation to only 30% of respondents who are in a cohabiting union and 0% in a marital union.

Table 3: Percentage change from Cohabiting in Wave 1 to Married in Wave 4 by select characteristics of the sample

Characteristics	Wave 1 - Cohabiting	Wave 4 - Married	Percentage Change
Sex			
Male	1,075		0
Female	6,229	87	1.40
Total	7,304		0
Race			
African	2,371		0
Coloured	3,840	87	2.27
White	1,094		0
Total	7,305		0
Highest level of Education			
Primary	1,011		

Secondary	6,294	87	1.38
Total	7,305		
Work status			
Working full-time	2,658		0
Working part-time	1,078		0
Not working	3,568	87	2.44
Total	7,304		0

Table 3 above presents the percentage change results from cohabiting in Wave 1 to being married in Wave 4, by selected characteristics of the sample. In providing a thorough interpretation of these percentage changes, the results show that females experienced the highest percentage change with regards to the transition from cohabiting in Wave 1 to being married in Wave 4, in relation to male respondents, as they exhibit a percentage change of 1.40% in relation to just 0% change. With reference to race, the highest percentage change from cohabiting in Wave 1 to being married in Wave 4 is prevalent among Coloured respondents (2.27% percentage change) in relation to all the other race groups.

In consideration of level of education, a percentage change from cohabiting in Wave 1 to being married in Wave 4 is observed among respondents who have a secondary education

(1.38%). Contrary to this finding, no percentage changes can be observed among respondents with a primary and tertiary education. In terms of work status, a percentage change from cohabiting in Wave 1 to being married in Wave 4 is observed among respondents who are not working, as they exhibit a percentage change of 2.44% in relation to respondents who are working full-time or part-time. Based on these findings, it can be concluded that percentages changes in the transition from cohabiting in Wave 1 to being married in Wave 4 are predominant specifically among respondents who are female, Coloured, have a secondary school qualification and are not participants in the labour force.

Table 4: Adjusted regression model (W1)

Independent variables	Adjusted odds ratios (P-value)	[95% Conf. Interval]
Sex		
Male	RC	
Female	0.55* (0.000)	0.4235631-0.7169954
Race		
African	RC	
Coloured	0.01* (0.000)	0.0074788-0.0109826
White	0.05* (0.000)	0.0454785-0.0646135
Highest level of education		
Primary	RC	
Secondary	0.00* (0.000)	0.0015605-0.0028213
Religious affiliation		
Christian	RC	
Muslim	0.01* (0.000)	0.0047555-0.0075436
Other	0.16* (0.000)	0.1207087-0.2014412
Work status		
Working full-time	RC	
Working part-time	0.09* (0.000)	0.0709867-0.1018245
Not working	0.01* (0.000)	0.0120412-0.017265

Table 4 above shows the adjusted multivariate findings of all the demographic and socioeconomic variables and the results show whether the reported significance of the unadjusted odds ratios from the bivariate models remain the same for the adjusted hazard ratios. The results obtained in Table 4 show that all of the variables are significant predictors of cohabitation as they all have p-values that < 0.05 , which thus indicates that they have a significant effect on the association between cohabitation and marriage. In interpreting the odds ratios for sex, the odds of being in a cohabiting union are 0.55 times lower for female respondents in relation to male respondents, while holding other covariates in the model constant. In addition, White respondents are 0.05 times less likely to be in a cohabiting union, followed by Coloured respondents who are 0.01 times less likely to be in a cohabiting union, in relation to African respondents, given that other covariates in the model are held constant. With regards to level of

education, respondents with a secondary education are 0.00 times less likely to be in a cohabiting union compared to respondents with a primary education. Additionally, respondents who follow the Muslim religious denomination are 0.01 times less likely to be in a cohabiting union, compared to respondents who are Christian. Furthermore, respondents who follow other religious denominations are 0.16 times less likely to be in a cohabiting union, compared to respondents who are Christian, given that other covariates in the model are held constant. In consideration of work status, respondents who are working part-time are 0.09 times less likely to be in a cohabiting union compared to respondents who are working full-time. Furthermore, respondents who are not working are 0.01 times less likely to be in a cohabiting union compared to respondents who are working full-time.

Table 5: Adjusted regression model (W4)

Independent variables	Adjusted odds ratios (P-value)	[95% Conf. Interval]
Cohabiting in Wave I		
No	RC	
Yes	0.21* (0.000)	0.01651-0.0260878
Sex		
Male	RC	
Female	6.20* (0.000)	5.3802-7.1351
Work for pay in last 7 days?		
Yes	RC	
No	5.53* (0.000)	4.7985-6.3758
Self- reported health status		
Poor	RC	
Good	0.61	0.5129-0.7290
Excellent	**	0.1967927-0.2801082

Table 5 above shows the adjusted multivariate findings of all the demographic and socioeconomic variables in relation to cohabitation being a precursor for marriage among the respondents. The results obtained in Table 5 show that all of the variables are significant predictors of the association between marriage and cohabitation at the first wave as they all have p-values that < 0.05 , which thus indicates that they have a significant effect on the association between cohabitation and marriage. In interpreting the odds ratios for cohabiting in Wave I, the odds of shifting from cohabiting in Wave I to being married in Wave 4 are 0.21 times lower among respondents who answered “no” when questioned whether they

were in a cohabiting union in Wave I, compared to respondents who answered “yes”. With reference to sex, the odds of shifting from cohabiting in Wave I to being married in Wave 4 are 6.20 times higher among female respondents in relation to male respondents, given that other covariates in the model are constant.

Furthermore, the odds of shifting from cohabiting in Wave I to being married in Wave 4 are 5.53 times higher among respondents who answered “no” when questioned about their work for pay in the last 7 days, in relation to respondents who answered “yes”. Additionally, the odds of shifting from cohabiting in Wave I to being married in Wave 4 are 0.61 time

lower among respondents who reported a good health status, in relation to those who reported a poor health status, while controlling for other covariates in the model. Overall, it can be observed that cohabitation is a precursor for marriage specifically among female respondents and respondents who answered “no” when questioned about their work for pay in the last 7 days as their odds of transition from cohabiting in Wave 1 to being married in Wave 4 are higher compared to other categories.

Discussion

The aim of this study was to establish if cohabitation is a precursor to marriage among youth in South Africa. Results show that 94% of youth who were cohabiting in Wave 1 were not married in Wave 4. In addition, the odds of marriage in Wave 4 among those cohabiting in Wave 1 were 0.21. This shows that cohabitation is not in fact a precursor for marriage among youth in the country. However, there was only four years between Wave 1 in 2002 and Wave 4 in 2006. So perhaps it is true that cohabitation is not a predictor of marriage in the short-run, but given more years together, this could be the case. This was found to be true in a study done in New Zealand whereby it was found that couples who cohabited for more than three years were more likely to get married than couples who were together for a shorter period of time (Baker and Elizabeth, 2014).

Another possible explanation for cohabitation not being a precursor for marriage could be due to the age of the respondents. This study examined youth, who were between the ages of 15 and 34 years in Wave 1. This sample was selected as it includes the mean age at marriage for the South African population which is 29 years old for women and between 31 and 33 years old for men (Statistics SA, 2012). However, this age group is characterised as being developmental, experimental and transitional. Youth are still completing their education, finding employment for the first time, gaining financial and social independence from their parents and guardians and are highly mobile (Brown and Larson, 2002, Juárez and Gayet, 2014, Goldberg, 2013). In addition to this, youth are facing many challenges including inequality, poverty and ill-health (Harrison et al., 2015, Altman et al., 2014, Cluver et al., 2012). For these reasons, they may not feel prepared for marriage and may remain in cohabiting relationships for a longer period of time.

Nonetheless there are several strengths to this study. First, the study was able to establish that cohabitation and marriage share similar determinants. Age, race, religion, place of residence and work status are

statistically significant predictors of both cohabitation and marriage. Given these similarities studies which examine marriage in South Africa, should possibly include cohabiting couples. Second, the longitudinal nature of the study made it possible to trace cohabitation and marriage in a type of life-course approach, measured on the same individual. In a cross-sectional study this would not have been possible since cohabitation and marriage would have to be measured on two different people instead of the same person. Thus this study fits into the few existing studies on life-course approaches to marriage and other forms of family formation (Bonetti et al., 2013, Hareven, 2013, Liefbroer, 1999). Finally, this study has attempted to make sense of two prominent family issues in research by attempting to find a causal association.

The study is not without its limitations. First and as alluded to above, the duration of years between Waves is not sufficient to test if cohabitation results in marriage in the long-term. Second, the data do not specify if the respondent's partner in Wave 1 is the same partner in Wave 4. It is possible that in the time between Waves, respondents could have had more than one cohabiting partner. It is also possible that the cohabiting partner and later married spouse are two different people. That is, the data do not specify if the cohabiting partner in Wave 1 is the same person some respondents married in Wave 4. Since the aim of the study was to test if the act of cohabitation is a precursor to marriage and not to examine the specifics of the number of partners involved, this limitation is minor but does lead to a recommendation that a study be conducted to examine the dynamics of persons involved.

Conclusion

Cohabitation does not result in marriage among youth within short periods of time. Persons in these relationships are not covered by the same legislative protection as married persons; however, they share many of the same characteristics. For this reason, the South African Matrimonial Property Act (1984) which allows for the division of property and assets after a marriage has dissolved should be expanded to include cohabiting persons since this study has shown that there is similarity in the characteristics of individuals. Further, while alternative forms of marriage, such as same-sex and polygynous marriages, are recognised and protected under South African law, there is no specific legislation relating to the rights and responsibilities of cohabiting persons. This should be further examined as cohabiting persons should be protected by law too, regardless of the duration of their relationship.

The lack of causal relationship in this study is in fact an encouragement for future research to examine the relationship using different datasets and different research methodologies. In doing so, more and a variety of information will be created which will contribute to our understanding of diverse family forms in Africa. And finally, a dataset with a longer duration should be used to test the long-term effect of cohabitation on marriage to further understand the dynamics of these relationships in South Africa.

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